Comments on the typical race of *Eremomela icteropygialis* (Lafresnaye)

by P. A. Clancey

Received 20th June, 1961

Lafresnaye described the small warbler species *Eremomela icteropygialis* (Lafresnaye), 1839: lower Orange River, north-western Cape Province, on a specimen presumably collected by Levaillant towards the close of the eighteenth century. The label on the specimen bears in the handwriting of Lafresnaye the locality "des Elephants" (*i.e.*, Olifants R., western Cape), corrected in the same handwriting to "d'Orange', and this same worker states in the original description that the specimen was "said to have come from the Orange River." Macdonald (1957) cast doubt on the stated provenance of the *Type*, and doubted if the species occurred on the lower reaches of the Orange River and as far south as the Olifants R. in the west, and based his taxonomic findings on such a mistaken belief. Winterbottom (1958) and Clancey (1959) have both shown that the species occurs widely throughout much of the western Cape, from at least the Richtersveld south to Doornbaai, south of the Olifants River mouth, and on the basis of the observations of the two workers named it is evident that no valid objection can be advanced to preclude the lower Orange River being accepted by researchers as the correct type-locality of *E. i. icteropygialis* on the grounds that the species does not occur there. Further, as there are cogent reasons for believing that the *Type* was collected by Levaillant, it is reasonable to assume that it was not obtained to the north of the Orange River, because, while it is known that this traveller-cum-naturalist did reach the lower Orange River in the neighbourhood of Pella Drift, it is still extremely doubtful if he penetrated any distance into what is now Great Namaqualand, and Forbes (1958) has recently produced a heavy weight of evidence to show that Levaillant did not enter Great Namaqualand at all (*cf.* Grant (1957)) .The possibility that the *Type* was not collected by Levaillant likewise raises no difficulty, as the hinterland of what is now South-West Africa was *terra incognita* at the time the *Type* of *E. i. icteropygialis* was collected (certainly long before 1839).

Macdonald, *loc. cit.*, records that of a series submitted to Mr. J. C. Greenway an old Andersson skin from Otjimbingwe, Swakop River, Damaraland, in the British Museum (Nat. Hist.) collection, most closely resembles the *Type* specimen of *E. i. icteropygialis*, now in the collection of the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A., the latter specimen being probably well over 150 years old at the time the comparison was undertaken. I do not believe that subspecific taxonomy is ever adequately furthered by comparisons between such antediluvian material, or that the use of "Otjimbingwe" as a sort of putative type-locality of *E. i. icteropygialis* serves other than to confuse that which is in effect quite straightforward, and, moreover, irrefutable on the basis of the fine fresh series now available in South African museums (*cf.* White (1961)).

In my revisionary notes on the Yellow-bellied Eremomelas of southern Africa (Clancey, *loc. cit.*), I showed that the populations of the western Cape Province (Richtersveld, south to Doornbaai), the north-western

Cape (east to Bushmanland and Kenhardt), and southern Great Namaqualand (all topotypical of *E. i. icteropygialis*) and those of the Asbestos Mountains, north of Prieska on the central Orange (topotypical of *E. i. perimacha* Oberholser, 1920: Asbestos Mountains, northern Cape), are not separable in any way. On the basis of this finding I placed *E. i. perimacha* in the synonymy of *E. i. icteropygialis*.

In the light of White's criticisms, I have re-studied the good series in the Durban Museum, and confirm that *E. i. perimacha* is a straight synonym of *E. i. icteropygialis*. White based his findings on a study of the British Museum series, but I submit that his material was inadequate, as by Macdonald's telling this collection does not contain any topotypical *E. i. icteropygialis*, whereas the Durban Museum collection possesses series from both the north-western Cape and the Asbestos Mountains. The material in the Durban Museum reveals graded change in South-West Africa from the typical race to paler backed, whiter throated and breasted and clearer yellow bellied birds in Damaraland, to which the name *E. i. sharpei* Reichenow, 1905: Windhoek, is applicable. A further study of our material confirms my earlier view that this is a good race, which ranges from south-western and southern Angola, southwards through the Kaokoveld and Ovamboland to Damaraland, northern Great Namaqualand, and the western, central and southern Bechuanaland Protectorate. As stated, it grades into the nominotypical race to the south of its ascertained range in South-West Africa and to the eastward, as shown by a good series in the National Museum of Southern Rhodesia from just north of the Molopo R. (discussed by White, *loc. cit.*, under "The Bechuanaland form").

Literature cited:—
Clancey, P. A. 1959 *Durban Museum Novitates*, vol. v, 16, pp. 204–206.
Forbes, V. S. 1958 *Ostrich*, vol. xxix, 2, pp. 79–85.
Grant, C. H. B. 1957 *Ostrich*, vol. xxviii, 2, pp. 83–97.
Lafresnaye, F. de 1839 *Rev. Zool.*, p. 258.
Macdonald, J. D. 1957 *Contribution to the Ornithology of Western South Africa*, p. 136.
White, C. M. N. 1961 *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, vol. 81, 5, pp. 90–91.
Winterbottom, J. M. 1958 *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, vol. 78, 7, pp. 132–133.

More Snake and Lizard Predators of Birds

by CHARLES R. S. PITMAN

PART II

(ix) Constrictors

(a) *Python sebae* (Gmelin), African Python.

AFRICA: SUDAN. Sweeney (1954) records an 8 ft. python swallowing a Guinea-fowl *Numida meleagris* (L.); three specimens (1953), between 3 and 4 ft., each containing bird remains—the only identifiable bird, in two of them caught on the same day within 100 yards of each other, being the Chestnut-crowned Sparrow Weaver, *Plocepasser superciliosus* (Cretzschmar); 4½ ft. specimen (1953) when caught disgorged three Guinea-fowl chicks; 3½ ft. specimen (1953) contained an unidentified sparrow; 3½ ft. specimen (1953) disgorged an adult Rock Bantam, *Ptilopachus*